



PASSPORT TO CULTURE

6th Season

2002-2003

Teacher's Resource Guide for
SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK

Sweet Honey in the Rock**Grades 3-8**

Dwight Carter

left to right: Aisha Kablil, Nitanju Bolade Casel, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Carol Maillard, Shirley Childress Saxton, Ysaye Maria Barnwell

Sweet Honey in the Rock is a highly acclaimed, Grammy Award-winning, female a cappella singing group. The group's Gospel-inflected, politically-laced repertoire of songs comes directly from the African-American musical tradition and includes chants, work songs, spirituals, blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, Gospel, and rap.



The New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) Arts Education Department presents the sixth season of the *Verizon Passport to Culture SchoolTime Performance Series*.

With *Passport to Culture*, Verizon and NJPAC open up a world of culture to you and your students, offering the best in live performance from a wide diversity of traditions and disciplines. At NJPAC's state-of-the-art facility in Newark, with the support of Verizon, the SchoolTime Performance Series enriches the lives of New Jersey's students and teachers by inviting them to see, feel, and hear the joy of artistic expression. The exciting roster of productions features the most successful New Jersey companies as well as performers of national and international renown. Meet-the-artist sessions and NJPAC tours are available to expand the arts adventure.

To help you enhance the live performance experience for your students, NJPAC provides this Teacher's Resource Guide and professional development workshops designed to reinforce the educational value of each production in the series.

The *Verizon Passport to Culture SchoolTime Performance Series* can make a world of difference – to your students and to you – right here in New Jersey, at NJPAC.

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TO TEACHERS AND PARENTS:

The resource guide accompanying each performance is designed

- to maximize students' enjoyment and appreciation of the performing arts;
- to extend the impact of the performance by providing discussion ideas, activities, and further reading that promote learning across the curriculum;
- to promote arts literacy by expanding students' knowledge of music, dance, and theater;
- to illustrate that the arts are a legacy reflecting the traditional values, customs, beliefs, expressions, and reflections of a culture;
- to use the arts to teach about the cultures of other people and to celebrate students' own heritage through self-expression;
- to reinforce the New Jersey Department of Education's Core Curriculum Content Standards in the arts.

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THE NEW JERSEY CORE CURRICULUM CONTENT ARTS STANDARDS

The *Sweet Honey in the Rock* concert and this guide's suggested activities present ample opportunities to reinforce the Arts Standards. Attending the concert coupled with pre- and post-concert discussion of singing styles, musical genres, and the function of music in society will enhance students' musical aesthetic awareness and provide opportunities for them to respond to the performance and associated topics. These reactions may be expressed verbally, musically, or in poetry or prose, offering the opportunity to hone communication and technical skills through creating art. Analysis of the performance also explores communalities among art forms, e.g., rhythm, timing, mood. Such knowledge may be applied in creating or critiquing any art form. Responding to the performance in varied formats also expands students' ability to evaluate any work of art, including that which they create individually or collectively. The music of *Sweet Honey in the Rock* and the guide's narratives afford a unique occasion to hear and begin to comprehend the scope of African-American music: its antecedents and development; its function in politics and society; and its historic and contemporary artistic accomplishments.

THE PERFORMANCE/ PRODUCTION

Their sounds vibrate. The pulse and syncopated rhythms of their voices touch the spirits and souls of their audiences. They are majestic in appearance and regal in manner. These six women, known as *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, appear on stage in beautiful, brightly colored, billowing African-inspired garb. Their props include chairs, two or three *shekeres*, rainsticks, drums, cowbells, and a hand-held rattle. Their main instruments are their voices, which are the focal point of the a cappella performance.

The song selections for each concert are chosen by a member of the group who is designated as the concert programmer for that performance. As the concert begins, the programmer thanks the audience for attending the show. She begins a narrative that sets the stage for the songs that will be sung during the concert. Prior to the performance, the other singers are not aware of the programmer's musical choices. They know, however, that the songs will be taken from the repertoire of music that the group has developed since its beginnings in 1973.

Even the programmer may not be certain of every song that will be included in a particular performance. Rather, she takes her cues from the mood and composition of the audience, combined with her feelings and those of the group.

The songs that *Sweet Honey in the Rock* performs come directly from the African and African-American musical tradition. Their Gospel-inflected repertoire consists of traditional songs from Africa, spirituals, blues, Gospel, work songs, jazz, and rap. The songs address many critical issues in today's society, including war and peace, freedom, justice, equality, homelessness, AIDS, and work, as well as current local and national events.

As the women segue from one song to another, they do so with a certain poise and quiet dignity that is equal only to the "sweet honey" that emanates from their magnificent voices. Many of the songs are characterized by a call-and-response format, an important aspect of the African and African-American musical tradition. Often, the group encourages audience participation, making the audience an integral and special part of this unique musical experience.



SHARON FARMER

THE ARTISTS

For 30 years, the women of *Sweet Honey in the Rock* have lifted their melodic voices in song to the delight of audiences throughout the world. The Grammy Award-winning, a cappella vocal ensemble is composed of six vibrant and talented African-American

here in our bodies." Interestingly, members of the group always refer to *Sweet Honey* as "she" or "her," making the ensemble a female entity.

Over the past 30 years, 22 women have passed through the ranks of *Sweet*



women, who appear on stage in African-inspired attire created by African-American designers.

The group, which is named after the traditional African-American song, was founded in 1973 by Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon. According to Dr. Reagon, "*Sweet Honey in the Rock* is a Black women's group because it was Black women who needed the music enough to show up the first time her sound came together." Reagon says that the group is a cappella because that is her most comfortable mode of expression. When people ask, "Where's your instrument?" she says, "It's right

Honey. Presently, the group consists of Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, who is also a curator emeritus for the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History and the 2002-2003 Cosby Professor of Fine Arts at Spelman College, Atlanta, GA; Dr. Ysaye Maria Barnwell, a classically trained violinist, speech pathologist, and public health administrator; Aisha Kahlil and Nitaju Bolade Casel, co-directors of First World Productions; Carol Maillard, a stage and film actress; and Shirley Childress Johnson, a professional sign language interpreter.

ELEMENTS OF A MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

The concerts that *Sweet Honey in the Rock* presents contain a variety of elements that are characteristic of vocal concerts in general, and African-American concerts in particular. Listed below are terms that will help students understand what they are seeing and hearing.

concert programmer - the member of the group who is responsible for deciding which songs will be sung at a given concert.

a cappella - a style of singing in which songs are performed without instrumental accompaniment.

improvisation - composing, reciting, playing, or singing extemporaneously.

shekere - a percussion instrument made from a dried, hollowed out gourd that is strung with beads.



polyrhythms - several rhythms performed simultaneously.

call-and-response - a characteristic of African-American music wherein the person leading the song sings one segment and the audience or other singers respond with another segment.

griot - a storyteller in traditional African societies, who is responsible for remembering and telling the history of the people, while passing on morals and values.

sign language interpreter/performer - a person who uses sign language to communicate the feelings, rhythms, highs, and lows of what is being performed.

repertoire - the complete list of plays, operas, dances, or musical works able to be performed by an individual or a group at a given time.

syncopation - a temporary displacement of the regular metrical accent in music.

Many people work together as a team to create a vocal concert:

songwriter/composer - a person who writes songs.

lighting designer - a person who creates a visual concept for a production through the use of illumination.

stage manager - a person who is responsible for overseeing all elements of the production in performance, including the technical crew's work.

sound engineer - a person who operates sound equipment (including microphones, monitors, and speakers) that amplifies what is performed on stage so it can be easily heard by the whole audience and the performers.

WHERE'S THE MUSIC COMING FROM?



The following briefly traces the development of the African-American musical tradition within the United States.

1619-1840 chants - recitations containing religious themes which asked for blessings or sought to appease the spirits and deities. The chants were expressed on board slave ships.

1619-1865 field hollers - extemporaneous and unaccompanied melodic speech used by enslaved Africans to send messages over distances in order to communicate needs, inquiries, and commands.

MID 1600s - MID 1800s work songs - extemporaneous and unaccompanied songs in call-and-response format sung by enslaved Africans as they labored in the fields, used to set pace of work and communicate messages.

1700s - LATE 1800s spirituals - songs created and sung in English by enslaved Africans. The songs covered many themes and emotions including Christian religious themes, death, alienation, sorrow, jubilation, and inspiration. Lyrics frequently incorporated the use of double meanings, some dealing with escape. The melodies were often lyrical and the rhythms complex.

LATE 1800s blues - a style of music that evolved from earlier forms of African-American songs, e.g. field hollers, work songs, spirituals, during the period when thousands of African-Americans migrated from the South to the North in search of a better life. Blues are typically written and sung by individuals rather than communally, and are usually accompanied, often by guitar or harmonica. Lyrics often expressed bitter experiences with slavery, discrimination, personal relationships, and poverty.

jazz - a type of American music marked by a strong, but flexible, syncopated rhythm, and by solo and ensemble improvisations. It first developed in New Orleans.

1920s Gospel - urban sacred music that is informed by the musical styles of spirituals, blues, jazz, and contemporary secular forms.

LATE 1940s rhythm and blues (R&B) - music that combines blues and jazz. It is characterized by a strong, simple rhythm and is sung by blues singers backed by large rhythm bands.

1970s hip-hop - music developed in New York City from technology used in Jamaican sound systems, funk music, and urban, Black-American rap poetry, characterized by the mixing of two recorded songs played simultaneously by a DJ with lyrics spoken or "rapped" over it. Now often used synonymously with rap or urban R&B with rap elements; the culture surrounding rap music.

rap - a highly rhythmic musical form, characterized by dense rhyming lyrics, percussive mouth sounds, and themes that address a variety of societal issues.

CUSTOMS, CULTURES, AND SOCIAL FORCES

To understand the history and development of African-American music, one must first gain an understanding of the history and culture of Africa, as well as how that culture transformed itself in America.

On the continent of Africa, there are thousands of ethnic groups, such as the Lesotho and the Zulu from southern Africa, and the Yoruba, the Akan, the Peul, and the Ashanti from West Africa. The groups have similarities which serve as a foundation for traditional African culture. For example, all ethnic groups share a belief in a supreme God. They also share the concept of revering ancestors, those predecessors who have died and passed on to the spirit world. Music, song, and dance play an integral role in each society, documenting the history, thoughts, feelings, opinions, and values of the culture.

When slave traders first traveled to Africa, they did not understand its various cultures. This lack of understanding led to a number of stereotypes about African people. For example, the slave traders thought that the Africans were lazy because they sang as they worked. They also believed that the Africans lacked moral values because both men and women were typically bare breasted and wore clothing covering only the lower parts of their bodies. The slave traders did not consider the fact that there was little need for clothing, as the African equatorial climate is

usually extremely hot. African people greeted the slave traders with warmth: opening their homes for them, giving them food and shelter, and celebrating the newcomers' arrival in their land. The slave traders misunderstood the Africans' humility, taking this kindness for weakness. They felt that the Africans thought that they, the slave traders, were gods.

It is important to note that many African kings and chiefs participated in the slave trade. Slavery had always been a part of African culture, as it had been in many other parts of the world. However, in Africa, slaves could marry whom they wanted; their children were not stolen and sold away; and they could be educated, own businesses, and possess their own property, land, and money. Therefore, the African kings and chiefs who participated in the trading and selling of their people had no idea how different the system of enslavement would be in America.

When Africans were enslaved and loaded on slave ships, no two Africans from the same ethnic group were boarded together. This was done so that they could not communicate verbally with one another and be able to plan an insurrection. However, the enslaved Africans found a way to communicate. On the ships, although they could not speak the same language, they began to communicate through the creation of rhythmic chants and songs. These chants and songs spoke directly to the issues they faced: their degradation, humiliation, and enslavement. In traditional African societies, people engaged in singing during the work day because the rhythm in the songs expedited the rhythm in their work. In America, as they struggled to learn English, slaves sang out their sorrows as field hollers while laboring in the cotton, rice, and tobacco fields of southern plantations.

In America, the system of slavery was brutal. Enslaved African Americans were often not treated like human beings. In fact, they were seen as 3/5 of a human being and were considered property. They were branded with hot irons to put the mark of the master on their bodies, and were brutally beaten when they disobeyed. The women were raped repeatedly and forced to have children. When the children were born, they were taken from their mothers and sold. Many times people were killed for the simplest reasons. They were told that they were nothing, that they had no history or culture, and that slavery was the best thing for them.

Many white people in the North and South were opposed to the institution of slavery. These abolitionists objected to the mistreatment of the enslaved, stating that it was inhumane, ungodly, and morally wrong. The slave owners soon realized that the public was listening to and agreeing with the abolitionists, so they decided to give the enslaved African Americans religious instruction. The slave owners believed this would demonstrate that they were not as inhuman as people thought.

These new religious teachings blended with indigenous African musical expression and gave rise to the birth of the spiritual. Many of these songs spoke of going to heaven as a means of gaining



through records and the radio. Although Gospel music began to emerge in the 1920s, it evolved in the 1960s as contemporary singers of sacred music incorporated into their singing the improvisational styles of jazz, the sultry sounds of the blues, and the rhythmic qualities of R&B.

In the early 1970s in the Bronx, NY, hip-hop culture and rap music evolved from young, African-American male disc jockeys (DJs). Working with two turn tables, the disc jockeys would spin different albums on each table to mix the music and create a new rhythm and beat, ultimately altering the sound of the music and creating new electronic polyrhythms. Periodically, the DJs scratched the needle across the albums to create another sound effect within the music.

Rap music developed further in the late 1970s in New York. It was chiefly characterized by the singer using his or her voice to mimic various percussion sounds. Rap songs deal with the issues that plague today's society and this

music has been criticized for its negative

GLOSSARY

abolitionism - the belief that slavery should be eliminated. Abolitionist movements were influential between the American Revolution and the Civil War.

Civil War - the war between the northern and southern states that occurred from 1861 to 1865.

culture - the beliefs, customs, arts, and institutions of a society.

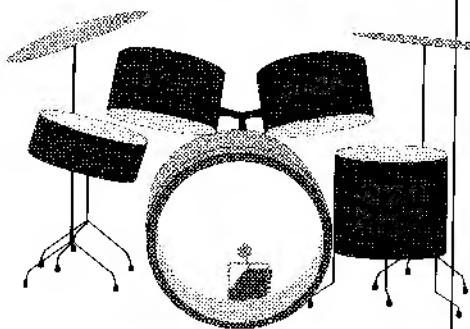
Middle Passage - the transatlantic trip that enslaved Africans endured as they were brought from Africa to the United States.

plantations - large farms in the southern United States where enslaved African Americans were held in bondage.

slave ships - the vessels that brought enslaved Africans from the continent of Africa to America.

slave trader - a person who purchased or captured other human beings and sold them for money.

slave holder - a person who purchased, owned, and enslaved other human beings.



BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Talking about the Concert

1. Ask students to name some differences between a cappella singing and songs accompanied by musical instruments. Have them consider how

a cappella singers utilize their vocal instruments. What instruments can a cappella singers mimic with their voices? (1.1)*

2. Have students use their own voices to mimic the sounds of the following instruments: bass guitar, harmonica, saxophone, drum. What differences do they hear in the sounds from their voices? (1.2)

3. Music is not only heard. It can also be felt, both physically (vibration) and emotionally (joy, sadness, love, fear, silliness, and fun). Ask your class what kind of feelings the following songs or types of music evoke: a love song, a nursery rhyme, *The Star Spangled Banner*, hip-hop music, an up-beat spiritual, classical music. (1.1, 1.4)

Discussing themes from the Concert

1. *Sweet Honey in the Rock's* repertoire covers a wide range of topics, such as women's issues, freedom, justice and

equality, AIDS, homelessness, and violence and/or abuse. Ask your class why they think it is necessary to talk about or be familiar with these issues. Do they think that the issues are less threatening when they are highlighted in a song? (1.5)

2. What do your students think it would feel like to be homeless? How do they think it would feel to be diagnosed as HIV positive? What problems do they think the homeless person or the person diagnosed as HIV positive would experience? (1.5)

3. "We who believe in freedom will not rest until it comes" is a quote from civil rights activist Ella Baker on which Dr. Reagon built *We Who Believe In Freedom*, a song from *Sweet Honey in the Rock's* repertoire. What does freedom mean to your class? Can students name any group of people who have had to struggle for freedom in the United States? What about people who have been oppressed in the rest of the world? (1.5)

4. In the song *Juba*, a person is not treated well and must confront the situation. What do students do when they do not like the way a person is treating them? How do they handle the situation? How would they handle it if the person were a teacher? A friend? A stranger? (1.5)

*Number(s) indicate the NJ Core Curriculum Content Standard(s) supported by the activity.

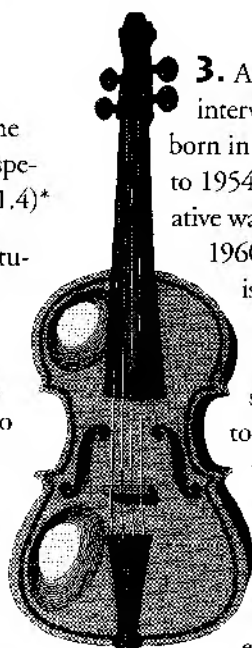
AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Talking about the concert

1. How did the various songs in the concert make students feel? What specific issues did the songs address? (1.4)*
2. What specific things did your students notice about the performance? (1.4)
3. Ask your students to describe the type of attire worn by the singers? Do they know the kind of fabric used to create the women's outfits? Do they know from which country the fabric came and how the fabric was made? (1.5)
4. Ask your students to research the origin of *shekeres* and how they are made. (1.5)
5. Have your students discuss how the concert programmer set the stage for the songs that were sung. (1.1)

Activities

1. Divide students into groups and have them write rap songs about increasing peace in the community or the world or other topics which are similar to those addressed in *Sweet Honey's* music. (1.3)
2. Assign students to read the poem *Mother to Son* by Langston Hughes. Ask them to identify the poem's message. Have them write a poem that includes an important message that they would like to share with other young people. (1.3)



3. Ask your students to interview a relative who was born in the United States prior to 1954. Find out where the relative was living during the 1960s and 1970s, and what issues were prevalent at the time. Ask him or her whether any of the songs he or she listened to dealt with the issues of the time. How did he or she feel about the manner in which the issues were presented in the music? Have each student write a report on his or her findings. (1.5)

4. At a *Sweet Honey in the Rock* performance, the concert programmer is equivalent in many ways to the griot or storyteller in traditional African societies. Ask students to talk with their parents and grandparents and find out what kinds of stories are part of their family history. How are these stories passed

from one generation to the next? Have the stories changed over the years? Do the stories pass on morals

and values that the families hold dear? Why are the stories meaningful to the respective family? Do family members plan to pass them on to their children? Ask students to write these stories and share them with the class. (1.2, 1.3, 1.5)

5. If your students were concert programmers for their vocal group, what songs would be a part of their concert? Ask them to list one song for each of the categories in the following list and have them state the reasons for their choices: spiritual/Gospel, classical, rhythm & blues, rap, hard rock, country western, jazz, Christmas carol, anthem (1.6)

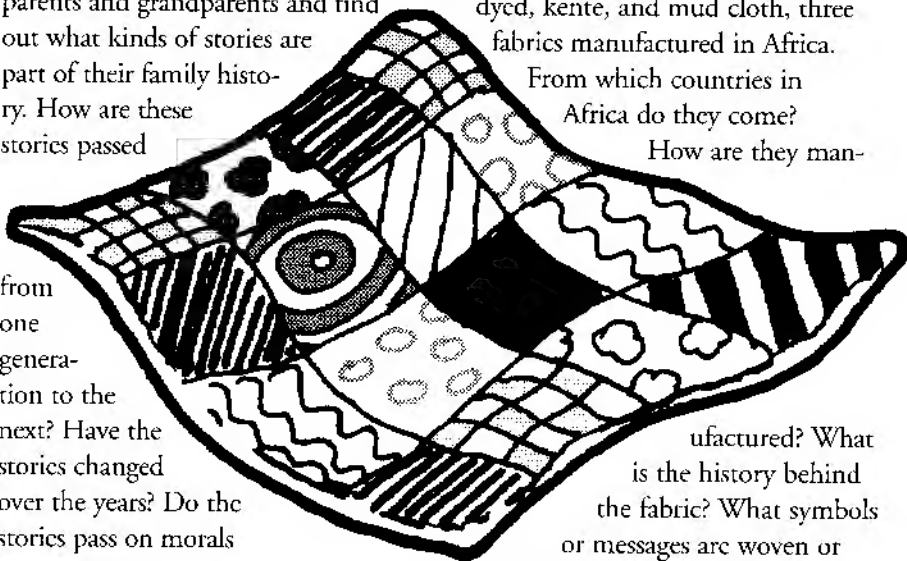
6. Have your students read a biography of Thomas Dorsey or Mahalia Jackson. Ask them to listen to some of his or her songs. On what kinds of themes does the music focus? What kinds of messages are contained in the songs? (1.5)

7. Ask the students to research tie-dyed, kente, and mud cloth, three fabrics manufactured in Africa.

From which countries in Africa do they come?

How are they man-

ufactured? What is the history behind the fabric? What symbols or messages are woven or



imprinted in the cloth? Using plain white, 100% cotton tee-shirts and tie-dye kits that can be purchased at most arts and craft stores, have the students create their own designs, including any symbols or messages that are important to them. (1.3, 1.5)

8. Plan an International Festival. Let each student bring in songs from his or her culture, including any background information on the music. Ask students to share food from their specific cultures. Students may also share stories from their heritage or invite a storyteller to come and perform. (1.6)

Discussing Themes From the Concert

1. Do students think *Sweet Honey's* songs have a "message" in the music? Why? If they had to compose a song about an issue plaguing society today, what would their message be? Have the class compose such a song. (1.3, 1.5)

2. The song *Patchwork Quilt* is about the AIDS quilt. If your students had to write a song about youth violence, what possible titles would they suggest? (1.5)

TEACHING SCIENCE THROUGH MUSIC (GRADES K-8)

by Lorna Staples, Ph.D.

The integration of science and music is a natural and stimulating experience for students.

The NJ Core Curriculum Content Science Standards state that students will develop an awareness of the need to protect and preserve natural resources and recognize that natural resources are not always renewable. The following activities outline how music can be incorporated into mastering these standards.

When beginning a thematic unit on the rain forest, have students compare the different parts of a house to the layers of the rain forest, e.g., chimney = emergent layer; roof = canopy; upstairs = under story; floor = forest floor; basement = sub floor. After students draw and label a side-by-side comparison picture, have them learn a song called *Layers in the Forest* (printed in *In the Rain Forest*, cited in Bibliography below), sung to the tune of *If You're Happy and You Know It*. The first stanza names the layers, while other stanzas describe each layer, what animals live there, and why they live there. Used as a theme song that is sung repeatedly throughout the unit, the song becomes a valuable source of information for students when carrying out related activities, e.g., researching a favorite rain forest animal, creating a food chain for it. Incorporating the song into the unit ensures that students will remember the importance of the rain forest to the earth.

While studying the environment and the locale around them, take students on a nature walk in a nearby park. Have them make visual observations and collect objects for their nature books. In a secluded park area, change the emphasis to listening to surrounding sounds. Have students sit quietly and for two to three minutes listen to the sounds of the place. Ask some students to make lists of the sounds that they hear while others record the sounds, using a tape recorder. Then, move to at least one different setting and repeat the exercise. Back in the classroom, have students identify the sounds that they heard and compare them to music. Discuss what instruments could make those sounds and the differences and similarities between man-made and natural sounds. This activity is enlightening to students because they are usually familiar with the importance of visual observation in science but not aware of the role that sound can play in making accurate observations.

The NJ Core Curriculum Content Science Standards also state that students will be able to demonstrate how sounds can be produced by vibrating objects and how the pitch of sound depends on the rate of vibration. The following experiment, which incorporates music, can explain these principles.

After students understand the meaning of the word "pitch," ask them why some sounds have a high pitch while others have a low pitch. Have students make a hypothesis. Then have them fill six identi-

*Number(s) indicate the NJ Core Curriculum Content Standard(s) supported by the activity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND TEACHERS' RESOURCES

cal bottles with varying amounts of water, the last bottle being full. Add food coloring to each bottle so that the colors range from red to purple to blue to green to yellow to orange. Instruct students to blow across the top of each bottle to make a musical note or tone. They will discover that when they blow across the bottles, the air inside vibrates to produce different sounds and by adjusting the amount of water in each bottle, they can produce a whole musical scale. The bottles with more air (or less water) produce low sounds and the bottles with less air (or more water) produce high sounds. After the students master making sounds by blowing across the bottles, divide them into teams. Have each team play or compose a song and write each note in its appropriate color so they can read and repeat their tune. Then have each team play their song for the others. The use of "bottle" music simplifies the scientific principle of some sounds having high pitch and some having low pitch because of the amount of air vibrating in a given space.

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Web Site

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NJPAC

The New Jersey Performing Arts Center, which opened in October, 1997, includes the 2,750-seat Prudential Hall, the 500-seat Victoria Theater, the Lucent Technologies Center for Arts Education, a restaurant, banquet facilities, gift shop, convenient parking, and Theater Square, an outdoor performance space. A new kind of performing arts center, equipped to present world-class events representing every conceivable art form, both traditional and popular, NJPAC stands as a symbol of community, excellence in artistic expression, and international cultural exchange.

Since 1994, the NJPAC Arts Education Department has provided the state's children, families, and educators with creative programs that nurture exploration and discovery in the production and performance of the arts. The *Verizon Passport to Culture SchoolTime Performance Series* is one of the many current arts education offerings at NJPAC. Others include Arts Academy, school residency programs in dance, theater, and music; Early Learning Through the Arts - The New Jersey Wolf Trap Program, residency programs for ages 3-5; after-school arts residencies with United Way agencies; the Summer Youth Performance Workshop; and professional development opportunities for educators. In association with prestigious statewide arts organizations and educational institutions, the Arts Education Department sponsors Jazz for Teens, the Youth Orchestra Festival, the All-State Jazz, Chorus, and Orchestra concerts, *The Star Ledger* Scholarship for the Performing Arts, and the Jeffery Carollo Music Scholarship Fund.

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